United States Department of Agriculture
Research, Education, and Economics

ARS □ ERS □ NASS □ NIFA

Policy and Procedures

Title: ARS Web Sites

Number: 030

Date: November 13, 2013

Originating Office: Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

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Distribution: ARS Headquarters, Areas, and Field Locations

This P&P establishes policy and guidelines for ARS employees developing and publishing content for public access on external ARS Web sites. It provides guidance to ensure all ARS Web sites represent the Agency and Department, and present public information, in a manner that supports the Agency's mission and is consistent with the Department's communication and information technology goals.

Table of Contents

1.   Purpose

This Policies and Procedures (P&P) document provides direction and guidance on developing and publishing Agency public Web sites. Its goal is to ensure high-quality, visually appealing, accessible, usable Web sites that offer informative, accurate information and conform to Agency and Departmental standards. This P&P also establishes responsibilities for authoring, maintaining, and releasing content on Agency Web sites.

2.   Background

The Web site is one of the primary tools for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to disseminate information to its stakeholders, customers, business partners, and the public. As a leading agricultural scientific research organization, ARS uses the Web to do the following:

- present mission and program information to the public and to convey research results and its public benefits
- serve as a technology transfer tool to share scientific collaboration information and research opportunities with business, agricultural, and scientific communities
- facilitate interactions between Agency researchers and staff with the public
- share news and information with the media, trade groups, other organizations, and the public
- provide value-added tools and resources to ARS customers and stakeholders
- stimulate an interest in science and technology and
- foster prospective employee interest in ARS

3.   Authorities

- Paperwork Reduction Act (44 USC Ch. 35 and 44 USC Sec. 3504)
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-130 Revised, "Management of Federal Information Resources," and Appendix III to Circular A-130, "Security of Federal Automated Information Resources"
- E-Government Act of 2002 OMB M-03-18, "Implementation Guidance for the E-Government Act of 2002"
- OMB M-00-13, "Privacy Policies and Data Collection on Federal Web Sites"
- OMB M-03-22, "Implementing the Privacy Provisions of the E-Government Act of 2002"
- OMB M-05-04, "Policies for Federal Agency Public Web Sites "
- OMB M-99-18, "Privacy Policies on Federal Web Sites"
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC Sec. 794d)
- Privacy Act (5 USC Sec. 552a)
- Children's Online Privacy Protection Act
- Plain Writing Act of 2010
- Presidential Memo on "Transparency and Open Government" (January 21, 2009)

- [National Archives and Records Administration General Records Schedule 24](), "Information Technology Operations and Management Records"
- [DM 3525-002](), "USDA Internet Use and Copyright Restrictions"
- [DR 1410-001](), "Publications Review/Clearance Policy"
- [DR 1490-002](), "Creative, Media and Broadcast Policy"
- [DR 1496-001](), "Digital Strategy Governance"
- [DR 1430-002](), "Use of Logos/Marks at the United States Department of Agriculture"
- [DR 3140-001](), "USDA Information System Security Policy"
- [DR 3140-002](), "USDA Internet Security Policy"
- [DR 3300-001](), "Telecommunications & Internet Services and Use"
- [DR 3430-001](), "Web Site Development and Maintenance"
- [DR 3440-002](), "Control and Protection of 'Sensitive Security Information'"
- [DR 3515-001](), "Use of Web Measurement and Customization Technologies"
- [ARS P&P 253.3.v2](), "ARS Cybersecurity Program"
- [ARS P&P 158.1](), "Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Guidelines"
- [ARS P&P 113.1](), "Publishing (Print & Electronic Material)"
- [ARS P&P 113.5](), "Social Media Use and Communication"
- [ARS P&P 251.08](), "Procedures for Publishing in Non-USDA Media (Outside Publishing)"
- [ARS P&P 251.8v2.0](), "Records Management"
- [ARS Manual 251.8M](), "Records Management"

4. Policy

ARS Web sites are one of the Agency's primary tools for disseminating and sharing information with its stakeholders, customers, and the public. As such, those public sites must exhibit a positive, professional image that combines functional and intuitive organization and the highest quality visual presentation and consistency, and must be written in plain language the public can understand. ARS Web sites must be a reliable information source that describes Agency programs and accomplishments and provides information that is accurate, relevant, up to date, and easily understood by the public. To achieve these objectives, all ARS Web sites must adhere to the following policies:

4-1. Hosting and Security

4-1.1. ARS Web sites must be hosted only on ARS-certified and ARS-accredited Web servers.

4-1.2. Access to Agency Web sites is provided to the public in a manner consistent with prudent operational and security considerations.

4-1.3. All Agency Web sites (including applications) and servers must be supported by a current and complete security plan and a formal system risk analysis developed in accordance with Agency guidelines.

4-1.4. ARS software developers must ensure their Web applications and scripts are secure before posting. As this is a technology-specific consideration, it is the responsibility of

the software developer to ensure that all appropriate security measures are in place. The Web Content Manager must ensure applications and scripts have been reviewed, edited, and authorized for release before posting to the ARS Web site.

4-2. Quality and Authority

4-2.1. Information may be made available on Agency Web sites only when approved for release in accordance with Agency policies on releasing information to the public.

4-2.2. Web page content may be posted to Agency Web sites only after it has been specifically authorized by the designated Web Content Manager (see Section 5, "Summary of Responsibilities").

4-2.3. All Web content must be related to official Agency business that is necessary to support and carry out the Agency's mission.

4-2.4. In general, Agency pages will link to, rather than contain, content maintained by another organization that is officially responsible for it. ARS sites will not create or store duplicate content for which another organization is responsible.

4-2.5. All hyperlinks must be valid and working. ARS sites must not display pages that are empty or pages that contain **ONLY** phrases such as "under construction" or "coming soon."

4-2.6. All Web content should be updated on a routine basis and as needed, based on the content and program/research needs. Content tied to specific dates/events should be monitored and removed/changed as appropriate.

4-3. Copyright and Persona

4-3.1. Agency Web sites may not include any copyrighted material, including photographs, music, videos, and graphics, without the written consent of the copyright holder. This does not apply to any information authored by ARS personnel and published in any non-Government publication, although the publication itself may be protected by copyright.

4-3.2. Photographs of members of the public in which they are identified by name may not be posted on Agency Web sites without prior written consent or a parent's or guardian's written consent in the case of minors. Non-copyrighted historical photographs are allowed. Photographs of employees must be either formal portraits or pictures of employees engaged in official duties.

4-4. Web Information Architecture

The ARS Web Information Architecture (see Attachment 1), or wireframes, depicts the Web site organization, page layout, and navigation systems for ARS Web pages. To ensure consistency and continuity, **ALL** ARS Web sites and Web pages must use the ARS wireframes, adhere to ARS P&P 030, and comply with the "USDA Web Standards

and Style Guide." (The most current version is located on USDA Connect: http://connections.usda.gov).

4-5. Web Sites

4-5.1. All research management units must have an ARS Web presence. The units must maintain the content of their ARS Web sites, which at a minimum contains dynamically generated information from centralized ARS data sources.

4-5.2. Locations can decide the need for an individual management, unit-specific Web site or can combine into a single location Web site.

4-6. General Appearance

Sites must maintain a visual consistency between the home and landing pages to avoid confusing Web visitors. Visual elements and content should be of professional quality, reflect the highest quality standards, support the Agency's mission and goals, and adhere to USDA visual standards and policies. Variation in design—including use of multiple fonts and font sizes, and non-professional-quality photographs and images—does not present Agency information in an official, high-quality, professional manner and often confuses visitors as to whether they are on a Government site. Visual consistency is defined as common textual and graphical formatting—including use of color, fonts, and arrangement of elements on the pages—to convey a sense of relationship and cohesiveness between the main page and the subpages. All images and visual elements must reflect an official work context/setting.

4-7. Required Elements

Required elements for ARS's Web architecture (home pages, landing pages, and subpages) must conform to the authorities listed in section 3 ("Authorities") and to the "USDA Web Standards and Style Guide."

4-7.1. The ARS header—including the masthead (Department name and logo, Agency name, navigation tabs, and background—and footer sections are required elements for **all** ARS Web pages. This includes landing pages.

4-7.2. The photo carousel must reflect the same style and placement as that on the ARS home page. (The main Agency photo carousel appears on the right.) Static images are okay to use, but content should be updated as often as possible.

4-7.3. Logos/marks, which include non-approved theme art or other research/lab graphical or branding-type identifiers, are prohibited from appearing on ARS Web pages. Only Agency/Department-approved logos/marks and theme art related to specific events/campaigns are allowed in the content section of Web pages (see DR 1430-002, "Use of Logos/Marks at the United States Department of Agriculture").

4-7.4. A mission statement and contact person will appear on all location home pages.

4-7.5. All pages must include the date the page or file was last updated or reviewed for accuracy.

4-7.6. Agency Web pages should include HTML metatags in the <head> section that includes keywords and a description. This information improves public search engines' ability to find relevant ARS pages and information.

4-7.7. The ARS social media "Stay Connected" box linking to ARS and USDA social media sites/tools must appear on every ARS Web page.

4-7.8. All Web pages including landing pages (and sub pages) must include breadcrumbs and left navigation column.

4-8. Navigation and Links

4-8.1. Links to Government agencies (Federal, State, and local) may be established without authorization.

4-8.2. Links to external USDA or ARS sites are allowed only if the site is sponsored, supported, or partnered by USDA or ARS; or if the site is educational in nature.

4-8.3. Some partnerships may be protected by Confidentiality Agreements. Links to these partner organizations need to be carefully reviewed by the site's Content Manager (see section 5-5., "Web Content Managers") before posting. ARS Technology Transfer Coordinators or the Office of Technology Transfer at headquarters serve as authorities for such links and should be consulted as needed for further guidance and interpretation.

4-8.4. External hyperlinks must include a visual cue or icon alerting users that links are external to USDA.

4-9. Editorial Style

Agency Web sites must reflect the principles outlined in the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and Presidential Memo on "Transparency and Open Government."

4-10. Accessibility

Agency Web sites must comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which requires Web sites to be broadly accessible.

4-11. Forms

Use of Web forms on ARS Web sites must comply with Federal E-Government initiatives and USDA security policies.

4-11.1. Forms on ARS Web sites that require collection of information from the public (including questionnaires) must receive prior approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and must display the OMB number and expiration date, instructions, and links to USDA's Privacy Policy and Paperwork Reduction Act statements, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act.

4-11.2. Forms on ARS Web sites that collect personal information must be supported by Privacy Impact Assessments for online information collections as required by OMB M-03-18, "Implementation Guidance for the E-Government Act of 2002." ARS Web sites will ensure that users' privacy is protected by secure transmission, storage, and data disposal.

4-11.3. ARS Web sites must comply with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act with respect to collecting personal information from minors on Web sites directed at them.

4-12. Web Content

All content posted on ARS Web pages must reflect and support official Agency business, and the Agency's mission and goals.

4-12.1. References to product/commercial names and/or outside organizations' content should contain the appropriate disclaimers.

4-12.2. All comments and views should reflect professionally/scientifically based information and standards.

4-12.3. Information designated "Sensitive Security Information (SSI)" under USDA DR 3440-002 is prohibited from being posted on Agency Web sites.

4-13. Individual Personnel Web Pages

Individual personnel ARS-hosted Web pages are permitted for employees in their official capacities if the information provided relates to and supports the ARS mission. ARS employees who establish Web pages accessible by the public must follow the guidelines outlined in this policy and in USDA DR 3430-001.

4-14. Collaborative Web Sites

ARS Research Management Units/Programs/Offices may host Web sites of groups that officially support (e.g. a "Friend" organization) or have an official collaborative relationship with the Agency, which supports the Agency's mission. Research Management Units/Programs/Offices may host collaborative sites when the Agency or an Agency management unit is one of several sponsors (for example, of a conference, working group, or research project directly related to the Agency mission).

4-14.1. Hosting of collaborative sites is subject to approval by the appropriate Web Content Manager and his/her supervisor. Approval decisions will be guided by ARS, USDA, and Federal policies on using Government technology, accepting non-appropriated funds, disseminating information, and other policies as appropriate.

4-14.2. Collaborative sites hosted on ARS servers must comply with all usability and security requirements of this policy, but will not be required to use the ARS Web

Information Architecture. However, these sites must contain, at a minimum, reference to ARS's role in the collaboration and a link to both the ARS and the USDA home pages.

4-14.3. Sites are not defined as collaborative under this policy when ARS is designated as the responsible party by charter or legislation or is the primary funder or sponsor.

4-15. Web Records Management

Web management and Web content records will be maintained in accordance with ARS and National Archives and Records Administration guidelines and in compliance with Appendix III to OMB Circular A-130, "Security of Federal Automated Information Resources."

5. Summary of Responsibilities

5-1. Administrator, Associate Administrators

Champion and promote maximum use of Agency Web sites to disseminate and exchange mission and research information with customers, stakeholders, business partners, the agricultural and research community, and the general public.

5-2. Deputy Administrators, Area Directors, Assistant Administrators, Business Service Center Directors, Program Officers, and Coordinators

Deputy Administrators, Area Directors, Assistant Administrators, Business Service Center Directors, Program Officers, and Coordinators have discretion on who they assign to perform these functions/roles (Web Content Manager, Site Web Master, and Server Administrator). One person or multiple people can carry out these functions/roles. The ARS OCIO handles many of the functions listed below as they apply to the overall ARS Web architecture/structure.

5-2.1. Designate a **Web Content Manager** and backup within each Area Office, Headquarters Office, Business Service Center, Program Office, or Research Management Unit who will be responsible for ensuring that all proposed Web content has been reviewed, edited, and authorized for release before posting on ARS Web sites.

5-2.2. Designate **Site Webmaster** who will work with the Enterprise Application Services Branch or Business Service Center IT Specialists or local IT Specialists to provide overall technical leadership, oversight, and support for their respective Web sites.

5-2.3. Designate **Server Administrator** who will work with OCIO Policy and Information Assurance Branch and Enterprise Application Services Branch, Business Service Center IT Specialists or local IT Specialists to manage and ensure security compliance of ARS Web servers.

5-2.4. Allocate staff resources to support Web activities within their area of responsibility.

5-2.5. Ensure that all Web content, administration, and management activities are in compliance with this policy.

5-2.6. Work with Business Service Center IT Specialists and/or local IT Specialists and OCIO Policy and Information Assurance Branch to ensure that a current and complete security plan is in place for all Office, Program, Area, and Research Management Unit Web sites in accordance with the requirements of ARS P&P 253.3.v2, "ARS Cybersecurity Program."

5-3. Chief Information Officer (CIO)

5-3.1. Budgets and allocates Agency OCIO resources in support of OCIO Web activities.

5-3.2. Establishes and issues policies and guidance governing use and management of ARS Web sites.

5-3.3. Directs the Enterprise Application Services Branch to work with Site Webmasters to provide overall technical leadership, oversight, and support for Agency Web sites.

5-4. OCIO Enterprise Application Services Branch (EASB)

5-4.1. Serves as the primary policy and technical consultant group on Web-related technologies for ARS.

5-4.2. Assists the CIO with writing Web-related policies.

5-4.3. Provides Agency-level oversight and technical and operational leadership for ARS Web activities.

5-4.4. Provides support, guidance, and assistance to Web Content Managers and Site Webmasters.

5-4.5. Promotes awareness and communication among Site Webmasters and Web Content Managers regarding Agency Web policies, issues, practices, and needs. Notifies Web Content Managers and Site Webmasters of major updates to the Agency's Web site.

5-4.6. Works with Web Content Managers to ensure that all Web content is in compliance with this policy.

5-4.7. Evaluates new Web technologies and determines potential benefits to ARS.

5-4.8. Administers and supports the main ARS Web site including, but not limited to, the following activities: posting Web content updates that have been authorized by Web Content Managers, authoring content and supporting Agency Web sites with special needs as appropriate, ensuring all page links are valid, generating daily backups of Web site content, and providing technical support and assistance for creating Agency Web pages.

5-4.9. Ensures all collaborative Web pages hosted under its purview comply with this policy.

5-5. Web Content Managers

5-5.1. Communicate as needed with EASB or Site Webmasters about needs and issues affecting Web content.

5-5.2. Ensure that all proposed Web content has been reviewed, edited, and authorized by appropriate line management/technical expert for public release, in compliance with this policy before posting on the Web site.

5-5.3. Authorize the Site Webmaster to post updated content to the Web.

5-5.4. Maintain Web management records, including copyright permissions and consents for use of personal photographs, in compliance with ARS and USDA policies.

5-5.5. Update or review Web content on an ongoing basis.

5-6. Site Webmasters

5-6.1. Serve as the primary technical consultant on Web-related technologies for each Web site.

5-6.2. Foster awareness among Web Content Managers about Agency Web policies and practices. Communicate with EASB about local needs and issues affecting Agency sites.

5-6.3. Work with Web Content Managers and Server Administrators to ensure that all Web content complies with this policy, including security requirements.

5-6.4. Administer and support the unit's Web site including, but not limited to, the following: posting Web content updates that have been authorized by Web Content Managers, ensuring that all page links are valid, and providing technical support and assistance for creating Agency Web pages.

5-6.5. Evaluate new technologies and determine the potential benefit to ARS.

5-7. Server Administrators

5-7.1. Ensure that Web servers hosting ARS content comply with Agency security requirements and policies and with generally acknowledged best practices.

5-7.2. Ensure that security plans are in place for servers under their control and that Web applications comply with Agency security requirements and policies.

5-8. OCIO Policy and Information Assurance Branch Staff

5-8.1. Serve as the primary authority on security policies relating to ARS Web sites.

5-8.2. Provide oversight and guidance on security issues to ensure all ARS Web sites are in compliance with Agency, Departmental, and Federal Information Technology security policies and regulations.

5-8.3. Work with EASB to periodically review and update security policies for Web systems and promote security awareness among the ARS user community.

5-8.4. Coordinate with Agency and USDA security officers in cases of intrusion to an ARS Web system.

5-9. ARS Information Staff

5-9.1. Provide oversight and guidance on information presented to the public.

5-9.2. Serve as an advisor to EASB and CIO in developing overall Web content and communication strategy for presenting information to the public on ARS Web sites (including using social media tools and related content) to ensure ARS information and quality standards reflect ARS and USDA communication guidelines, policies, and communication goals.

5-9.3. Ensure consistent communication messaging across Agency Web sites; ensure all ARS Web sites reflect and support the ARS mission and USDA brand.

5-9.4. Serve as the authority on visual standards for the overall ARS Web site. Ensure visual elements meet and adhere to Agency and Departmental guidelines.

5-9.5. Work collaboratively with OCIO staff to manage communication messaging and coordination, provide content oversight, and ensure adherence to Departmental and Agency digital assets management guidelines (including photos, videos, podcasts, etc.).

6. Exhibit

Attachment 1 – ARS Web Information Architecture Wireframes

_____   _____

Paul R. Gibson, CIO   Date
USDA-ARS Office of the Chief Information Officer

Wireframe: ARS Home Page

| USDA Logo | **United States Department of Agriculture**
Agricultural Research Service | ARS Home\| About ARS \| Contact Us
[ ] 🔍
Site Map \| A-Z Index \| Advanced Search \| Help |

[Research] [People & Locations] [Newsroom] [Careers]

Popular Topics
Topic 1
Topic 2
Topic 3
Topic 4
Topic 5
Topic 6
Topic 7
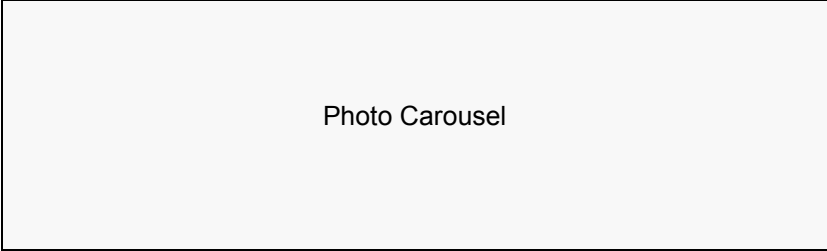
Photo Carousel
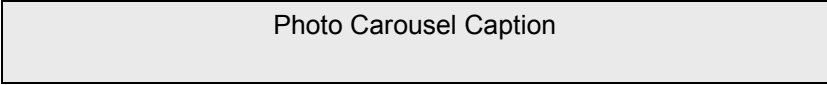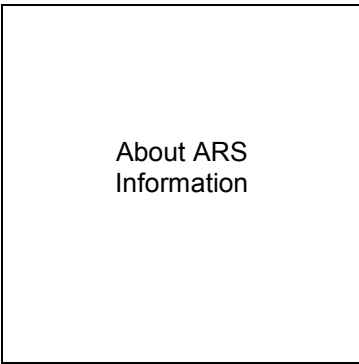
Stay Connected:
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Photo Carousel Caption

[News] [Resources] [Latest Blogs]

Link 1
Link 2
Link 3
Link 4
Link 5
Link 6
Link 7
Link 8
Link 9
Link 10

About ARS Information

Quick Links
[ ] Link 1
[ ] Link 2
[ ] Link 3
[ ] Link 4
[ ] Link 5
[ ] Link 6

Key ARS Offices and Locations

Office of the Administrator
  Administrative and Financial Management
  Budget and Program Management
  Information Staff (Public Affairs)
  Legislative Affairs
  Office of Chief Information Officer (IT)
  Office of Outreach, Diversity, and Equal
  Opportunity
  Office of Technology Transfer
National Program Research Areas
  Animal Production and Protection
  Crop Production and Protection
  Natural Resources and Sustainable
  Agricultural Systems
  Nutrition, Food Safety, and Quality
  Overseas Biological Control Laboratories
  Office of International Research Programs
National Agricultural Library

Research Locations (Map)
Beltsville Area
  (DC, MD)
Mid South Area
  (AL, KY, LA, MS)
Midwest Area
  (IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI)
North Atlantic Area
  (DE, MA, MD, ME, NY, PA, WV)
Northern Plains Area
  (CO, KS, MT, ND, NE, SD, UT, WY)
Pacific West Area
  (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, WA)
South Atlantic Area
  (FL, GA, NC, PR, SC)
Southern Plains Area
  (AR, NM, OK, TX)

Wireframe: ARS Landing Page

USDA Logo

United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Research Service

ARS Home| About ARS | Contact Us

Site Map | A-Z Index | Advanced Search | Help

| Research | People & Locations | Newsroom | Careers |

You are here: Home / Category / Sub-Category / Page Title   **Stay Connected:** ● ● ○ ● ○ ●

Related Topics

Link 1
Link 2
Link 3
Link 4
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Title

Sub-title
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Wireframe: ARS Location Page

USDA Logo

United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Research Service

ARS Home| About ARS | Contact Us

ARS Research | ARS People & Locations | ARS Newsroom | ARS Careers

Site Map | A-Z Index | Advanced Search | Help

Lab/Location Name
Research Projects
Publications
Software/Data
People
News
Collaborations
Careers

Stay Connected to ARS:

Photo Carousel

Photo Carousel Caption

| Research | News | Publications |

Research project title 1

Research project title 2

Research project title 3

Research project title 4

Research project title 5

Lab/Location
Contact Information

Lab/Location Mission
Statement

Lab/Location People

Employee 1
Employee 2
Employee 3
Employee 4
Employee 5
Employee 6
Employee 7
Employee 8
Employee 9

| Key ARS Offices and Locations | Area Locations |

Area Office

City, State
  Center name
    Lab name
    Lab name

City, State
  Lab name
  Lab name
  Lab name

City, State
  Lab name

City, State
  Center name
    Lab name

City, State
  Lab name
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City, State
  Lab name
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